



Memorandum

TO: Historic Landmarks Commission

FROM: Courtney Damkroger

SUBJECT: SEE BELOW

DATE: May 6, 2002

APPROVED:

DATE:

SUBJECT: PDCSH01-03-038, PLANNED DEVELOPMENT REZONING TO ALLOW DEMOLITION OF EXISTING BUILDINGS AND CONSTRUCTION OF UP TO 245 MULTI-FAMILY ATTACHED RESIDENTIAL UNITS AND AN APPROXIMATELY 0.61-ACRE PARK ON THE WESTERLY SIDE OF STOCKTON AVENUE BETWEEN CINNABAR STREET AND LENZEN AVENUE.

BACKGROUND

The developer, Seven Hills Property, is requesting a Planned Development Rezoning on behalf of the property owner from LI Light Industrial to A(PD) Planned development to allow up to 245 multi-family attached residential units and an approximately 0.61-acre park on a 4.19 gross acre site. The subject site is located within the Shasta-Hanchett Park neighborhood and is comprised of five parcels addressed at 421-435 Stockton Avenue, and 799, 891 and 945 Cinnabar Street. The site has frontages on Lenzen Avenue, Stockton, Cinnabar, and North Morrison Street, and is currently developed with four buildings that house a variety of light industrial and commercial uses and a single-family detached residence. There is a 35-foot tall Coast Live Oak tree located near the northwest corner of the project site at the Lenzen Avenue frontage that is eligible for Heritage Tree status. The City Arborist has recommended that the 48-inch diameter tree be considered for heritage status, as it is a “unique specimen in the urban forest both because of its size and location.”¹ All existing buildings will be demolished. The developer proposes to preserve the Coast Live Oak as part of the parcel to be dedicated for parkland.

The site is surrounded by (1) commercial and industrial uses to the north and south; (2) single-family detached and multi-family attached residences to the west; and (3) the Pacific Gas & Electric Corporation yard to the east. The multi-family attached residences to the west along the Lenzen frontage are currently under construction.

William Self Associates prepared a Historical Report (attached) for the existing buildings. The subject site was originally part of the Mission Santa Clara agricultural property before it became part of Rancho El Potrero de Santa Clara, which was granted to James Alexander Forbes by the California Governor in 1844. Subsequent owners were Robert Stockton, and partners Charles Polhemus and Henry Newhall. Theodore Lenzen purchased the parcels at the southwest corner of the subject site in 1873, but did not develop them. In 1913, George Muirson founded the

¹ Department of Transportation, City Arborist Memorandum dated April 2, 2001.

Muirson Label and Carton Company at the southwest corner of Stockton and Lenzen Avenues (425 Stockton Avenue). The company specialized in the production of labels and wraps for the food industry. Muirson Label and Carton Company was the only designer and printer of labels in the Santa Clara Valley. Between 1916 and 1966, Ralph Rambo, well known local historian and artist, worked for Muirson starting out in the foundry and ending up as the head of the Art Department.

William Binder, a local architect known for many downtown commercial buildings including the Hales Department Store, the YMCA, the Montgomery Hotel, and the Hester/Towne Theater on The Alameda, designed the original Muirson building. The Muirson building is Binder's only known factory building. An addition to the original building was made in 1928, and the first warehouse was constructed in 1927. While the architect for the expansion is not documented, it is likely that Binder designed the additions. Two more warehouses were added in 1934 and 1946. The International Paper Company purchased Muirson Label Company in 1960, and the plant operation was relocated to Newark in the mid-1970s. John Serpa, the current property owner, purchased the project site from International Paper Company, and has continuously rented the building spaces to a variety of tenants including Antique Showcase, Security Storage Center, and various auto body shops. The Muirson Label facility is listed in the City of San Jose Historic Resources Inventory as a "Structure of Merit." Evaluated in 1987, the buildings received a 52 rating. Reevaluation of the facility in 2001, based on revised criteria, resulted in a rating of 92 points, which makes the Muirson Label facility eligible for listing as a "Candidate City Landmark." 421-435 Stockton Avenue also qualifies for the California and National Registers based on the facility's local significance to the fruit processing industry.

While the Muirson building was constructed in several phases, it retains a high level of historic integrity. The main exterior facades have not been altered since the building's period of primary significance, 1913-1945. The two buildings that comprise the main facility, the original production facility at 425-435 Stockton Avenue and the 1934 warehouse at 421 Stockton Avenue, were constructed of reinforced concrete on a concrete slab foundation, have steep gabled roofs, rough plaster surface, and a series of industrial sash windows along the ground level. The interiors of the buildings have been divided into numerous tenant spaces, yet the original interiors are primarily intact.

The property at 799 Cinnabar Street, purchased by the Jacob Luther estate in 1924, remained vacant until 1987, when the existing light industrial building was constructed. The simple, utilitarian building is not eligible for the City of San Jose Historic Resources Inventory, nor is it eligible for either the California or National Registers.

The small, wood-frame single-family house located at 891 Cinnabar Street was the first building constructed on the project site. Built in 1905, the residence has had several owners, and has mostly been used as a rental. While the original exterior siding has been covered with asbestos shingles, the house retains a good level of historic integrity. However, 891 Cinnabar Street is a simple, working class home, and is not a distinguished or unusual example of residential architecture in the City of San Jose. The house is not eligible for the City of San Jose Resources Inventory, the California Register or the National Register.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

A Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was prepared for this project and circulated on April 5, 2002. Numerous issues are addressed in the EIR; however, the key issue is cultural resources. As discussed in the Background section above, a Historical Report was prepared for the existing facilities. The project site is located in an archaeologically sensitive area.

ANALYSIS

The project would demolish the existing buildings to allow an in-fill residential development in conformance with the General Plan.

It is the understanding of Planning staff that a portion of the site will be dedicated for park uses for the surrounding area.

Planning staff recommends the following mitigation measures. Prior to demolition, the applicant would consult with History San Jose, Preservation Action Council of San Jose and the Historic Landmarks Commission to determine whether and what elements of the buildings warrant salvage for public information or reuse in other locations. Any elements not identified through this effort should be made available to salvage companies facilitating the reuse of historic building materials. Prior to demolition, the buildings should be documented in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Historic American Building Survey (HABS) to at least Documentation Level III. Planning staff recommends that four original copies of the documentation be provided to the Historic Preservation Officer for review. Upon approval, copies will be forwarded by the Historic Preservation Officer to History San Jose, California Room at Martin Luther King JR Library, San Jose State University and the Northwest Information Center at Sonoma State University.

In addition to the above standard mitigation measures, Planning staff recommends that the applicant develop a public exhibit and education program on the Muirson Label Company and the fruit processing/canning industry in the Santa Clara Valley in consultation with History San Jose. This program would include information on the career of Ralph Rambo. A qualified historian, as described in the Professional Qualification Standards of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation, should be responsible for the development of the exhibit and education program.

RECOMMENDATION

Planning staff recommends that the Historic Landmarks Commission recommend the aforementioned measures and forward comments to the Planning Commission.

Courtney Damkroger
Historic Preservation Officer

Historic Landmarks Commission

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